

Acceptance of the Paleontological Society Schuchert Award by Erik Sperling

Erik Sperling*

Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA <esper@stanford.edu>



Thank you. I feel incredibly honored to receive this award from the society. This society has been such an important part of my professional career, from crucial student grant awards to the personal relationships it has fostered, to all the things it does for the greater good of paleontology, and I feel deeply appreciative of the award.

My professional success would not have been possible without the abundant support and teaching I have received from my mentors. Thanks to all of you, so much, for everything you have taught me about how to be a good scientist, a good person, and ultimately, hopefully, a good mentor. This list starts with Jim Ingle at Stanford but then includes Jim Gehling at the South Australian Museum, Derek Briggs at Yale, Kevin Peterson at Dartmouth, Andy Knoll, Francis Macdonald, and David Johnston at Harvard, and Lisa Levin at Scripps. It feels completely inadequate to thank you for all the ways you have helped me in the space allotted here, so I'll look forward to thanking you more and in detail in person.

There are a number of friends and colleagues that have both made the scientific process more fun and taught me so much along the way. This includes Simon Darroch, Michelle Casey, Marc Laflamme, Rafe Rosengarten, and Alysha Heimberg during my graduate years. I learned such an incredible amount from Jakob Vinther as an office mate and friend, and during the comparative embryology course at Friday Harbor, my friendship and eventual collaboration with Christina Frieder at Scripps ultimately led me down a path toward ecology and physiology. The take-home message is that all invertebrate paleontologists should spend some time at Friday Harbor. Una Farrell was a wonderful lab mate at Yale, and she has since become the guiding geoinformatic light at the Sedimentary Geochemistry and Paleoenvironments Project, or SGP. Nobody but Una had the right mix of skills to get this off the ground or accomplish what we have. Thank you so much, Una. Although my heart lies in field geology and specimen-based paleontology, I look forward to the prospects in paleontology for combining data from the PBDB, SGP, and Macrostrat to gain a detailed understanding of the relationship between environmental change and biotic response in deep time. The final key to this understanding is using physiology as the bridge between the environmental and paleobiological records; I wish I could talk and write about this as eloquently as Andy Knoll does.

I have to thank the outstanding group of postdocs and grad students that were at Harvard, including Emmy Smith, Cori Myers, Wil Leavitt, Alan Rooney, Ben Gill, Maya Gomes, Rowan Martindale, and Kristin Bergmann. I especially thank Justin Strauss for his friendship and for patiently helping build back my field skills after a Ph.D. focused on molecular biology.

At Stanford, I have felt very fortunate to enter into a department with multiple paleontologists focused on understanding how environmental change affects organisms and vice versa. Jon Payne, Kevin Boyce, and Andrew Leslie have been fantastic colleagues in this regard. Most important, the past and current members of my lab have exceeded my wildest expectations, and certainly the papers that I am most proud of are all authored by my students and postdocs. It has been a true honor and pleasure working with and learning from all of you.

Finally, I thank my family. My parents, Dale and Carol, have always been so supportive of whatever I have wanted to do, and I am pretty sure that my dad is responsible for about half the YouTube views of any video of me that is posted online, as he tries to understand what exactly is going on with oxygen,

*Corresponding author.

animals, and Earth history. I knew I wanted to marry my wife, Laramie, from the moment I met her, but I never really imagined just how wonderful a partner she would be in all aspects of my life. I love our little family. And thank you to my son, Cody, for reminding me how exciting it is to play in the rocks and dirt. We took him gold panning in Yukon, and it was literally the best thing that had ever happened to him. With 24 hours of daylight,

I doubt he ever would have stopped. So thank you, Cody, for reminding me to be in the moment and that if you are doing something you love, never stop.

In conclusion, thank you so much to the society, my mentors, my friends and colleagues along the way, my lab group, and my family. The Schuchert award is an amazing honor and I greatly appreciate it.